

July 22, 1975

Dr. Martin Kaplan  
World Health Organization  
1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland

Dear Martin,

This is just a brief follow-up on our telephone conversation. I have to tell you that I had some ambiguous statements by Mr. Renshaw of Prism Magazine which implied that he acquiesced in the limited distribution of my article for publication but felt rather uncomfortable about it. I would be amazed if anything short of the most strenuous efforts by WHO would achieve such visibility as to substantiate his concerns, and I must say I am also irked by his attitude of somewhat limited cooperation. Unfortunately I did not take the usual precaution that I have almost routinely done in submitting manuscripts, namely to reserve to myself auxiliary rights of this kind. I will know better next time. I do not really foresee any problem but it would not be discrete to have that particular annex issued as a formal printed document for distribution beyond the immediate needs of the press conference. Perhaps after it is in print there would be less objection to a further distribution if you see any interest in doing that, and I think there might be in an organ like World Health. But I guess you know that editors are rather jealous about priority in publication.

I have been reading through some of the documents and official records of which I have begun to receive the stream that I had requested. I must say that it is rather heavy going trying to extract the essential data from the mass of detail. For example, the proposed program budget (official records No. 220) nowhere gives a very clear explanation of the policy judgments that account for the differentiated growth and decline of different sectors between 1974 and 1977. For example, I am at a loss to know what underlies the substantial projected reduction of support for items 6.1.2 and 6.1.3. On page 17 there is a rather hazy reference to WHA 27.49 which I suppose must be an arcane way of referring to a politically sensitive basis for the policy shift. (This is not to suggest that I have any position on the matter, I am just concerned about the amount of effort that is required to understand a document of this kind). If there is other material that would be helpful as a road map to the program, I will of course be very grateful to know about it.

One of the sources of my perplexity is also to try to identify the different people and groups who are responsible for various activities. I suppose this must be a long-standing tradition but I find it difficult

even to find the director's name, and the table of organization is hardly more illuminating. I suppose this is something I can get on a more personal basis, but it was interesting to observe that the organizational chart does not even refer to the DDG by title much less name.

I am of course particularly interested in knowing the process, the administrative structure, and the personalities that are involved in the fundamental planning effort. And I suppose you will have to tell me this somewhat personally to describe the realities as well as the theoretical structure.

Let me turn to one very specific research item that struck me on this first perusal. Again and again there are references to the stability of vaccines and other medicinal agents as a limiting factor in their utilization in tropical countries. It is a matter of common sense that mechanical refrigeration is hardly the optimal answer to this problem for many field applications although this may be the basic orientation in the distribution of thermosensitive substances in advanced countries. It seems to me it would be important to try to develop a fairly well focussed but rather basic research program to find solutions to this problem which could, of course, have very great leverage at a practical level. If you already have information about WHO activities or expert advice in this area, or other bibliographic material on research relating to the stabilization of biological materials, I would very much like to see that. I have some of my own connections that I can be pursuing in parallel; in particular there have been a few studies that NASA has sponsored to learn more about the survivability of micro-organisms under harsh environmental conditions that might be quite germane to this question. For example, it is well known that bacteria actually imbedded in soil are much more resistant to thermal inactivation than the same organisms in solution, and I think that if systematically investigated, these adsorptive effects might be very useful indeed for the practical preservation of certain vaccines. In fact, one of my former graduate students is connected with this program at the present time, and if I could get some more tangible leads from you about models of high priority concerns, she might be able to spend some of her own time on it within the very near future.

This kind of consideration suggests that there might indeed be some value to a brain-storming study (and I think rather that than a single convened session) to try to identify specific research challenges that would be of high priority for health needs. I have in mind an output document that would be similar in form to the thing that Noel Vietmeyer at the National Academy of Sciences helped put together on "Food Science in Developing Countries: a collection of unsolved problems". Scrimshaw in fact played a substantial role on that study also. If you have not already seen it, I know that Howard Goodman has a copy.

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As I start trying to get some overview of WHO's general tasks, I of course am almost overwhelmed by their complexity and also by the wide variety of existing agencies and procedures that are already engaged in international health planning. I will need to get some better perspective on whose decisions really count in this arena before I can offer anything the least bit sensible by way of further commentary. So, let me reiterate that failing the opportunity for a lengthier visit in September, I would be glad to look for an occasion where I could meet either with you or with Dr. Mahler at your own convenience for some few hours in order to thrash these things out in more detail after having done some of this literature homework. My own convenience is governed more by the shift of time zones than any other consideration.

As to the matter of arrangements for September, while we are a little disappointed not to be able to make it just at that time, we did not really make any very strong commitments but it was useful to get information from you on this notice. At this time the first half of December seems reasonably plausible, although it may take a little more doing on Marguerite's part to be able to join me. We probably will not bring either of our children in that circumstance. As to Marguerite's role, which we have discussed, her time probably would be more usefully spent in working very directly and closely with me than in attempting to find some contrived niche on the mental health program. From her own background and experience she has a perspective that I have always found very useful in broadening my own outlook. A letter from you addressed to her inviting her to participate in this study in collaboration with me would be most useful in enabling her to get leave from her other duties for the interval. I am sure that her residency-training supervisors will recognize the occasion as a remarkable opportunity, so that everyone should profit from the arrangement.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr